

Message Text

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PAGE 01 LIMA 02113 141941Z

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ACTION ARA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY LIMA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4311

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E.O. 11652: NA

TAGS: PINT, PE

SUBJ: PRESIDENT VELASCO'S HEALTH

REF: LIMA 2002 AND PREVIOUS

1. PRESIDENT VELASCO MET MARCH 14 FOR 1-1/2 HOURS WITH U.N. SECGEN WALDHEIM IN PRESENCE OF PRIMEMINISTER MORALES-BERMUDEZ, FOREIGN MINISTER DE LA FLOR, MINISTER OF INDUSTRY AND PRESIDENT OF UNIDO CONFERENCE JIMENEZ, AND THE AVIATION AND NAVY MINISTERS. MEETING IN VELASCO HOME IN CHACLACAYO WAS ATTENDED AND EXTENSIVELY COVERED BY MEDIA (INCLUDING T.V.).

2. VELASCO REMAINED IN WHEELCHAIR DURING CONVERSATION BUT WAS ANIMATED AND APPEARED TO CONVERSE WITHOUT DIFFICULTY. HE JOKED ABOUT BEING PUT ON A STRICT DIET FOR WEIGHT CONTROL PURPOSES. VELASCO PASSED UP THE HORS D'OEUVRES AND COCKTAILS AND CONFINED HIMSELF TO MINERAL WATER.

3. SEVERAL TOPICS WERE DISCUSSED BY VELASCO AND WALDHEIM INCLUDING THE ISSUE OF MULTINATIONAL COMPANIES (WHICH VELASCO DECLARED HAD NO PLACE IN PERU) AND THE QUESTION OF PERUVIAN-U.N. TROOPS (SEPTEL). MEDIA ACCOUNTS INDICATED VELASCO WAS INTERESTED IN AND RESPONSIVE TO THESE TOPICS.

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PAGE 02 LIMA 02113 141941Z

4. COMMENT: NEWS SOURCE TOLD EMBASSY THAT WALDHEIM REMARKED

TO VELASCO THAT HE APPEARED IN GOOD HEALTH. VELASCO PURPORTEDLY REPLIED "FROM THE WAIST UP". SAME SOURCE NOTED THAT VELASCO NEVER MOVED HIS LEFT LEG DURING SESSION WITH JOURNALISTS. HOWEVER, HIS VOICE WAS STRONG AND HE APPEARED TO ENJOY WALDHEIM VISIT AS WELL AS REPARTEE WITH JOURNALISTS. WALDHEIM DID TELL PRESS VELASCO WAS IN "GOOD FORM".

5. EMBASSY REPORTED IN REFTELS SEVERAL VERSIONS REGARDING VELASCO'S NON-ATTENDANCE AT UNIDO INCLUDING THE CAREFULLY-PHRASED STATEMENT OF GENERAL MORALES BERMUDEZ WHICH SAID THAT DOCTORS MAY HAVE MADE DECISION. ANOTHER VERSION NOW CIRCULATING IS THAT VELASCO'S FAMILY WAS ABLE TO PREVAIL ON THE PRESIDENT TO PROTECT HIS PRECARIOUS HEALTH; THEREFORE THE DECISION WAS A FAMILY ONE.

6. THE WALDHEIM INTERVIEW WAS A WELL-PLANNED EFFORT OF GOP AND CONTROLLED MEDIA TO COUNTER RUMORS OF ILL HEALTH AND TO PRESENT VELASCO IN BEST POSSIBLE CIRCUMSTANCES. EMBASSY HAS LEARNED FROM DIPLOMATIC OBSERVER AT UNIDO CONFERENCE THAT WALDHEIM WAS FURIOUS AT BEING USED BY GOP AS PART OF STAGED PERFORMANCE FOR PURELY DOMESTIC PURPOSES.

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